



OUR MISSION

To preserve and protect the unique rural character, the natural environment, and the heritage of the Route 340 corridor from Front Royal to Waynesboro.

The Scenic 340 Project

Preserving our unique local heritage

THE ISSUE:

The historic rural character of the Page Valley, and that of the entire Shenandoah Valley, is threatened by outmoded transportation planning. The Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT) existing study for the Route 340 corridor, and its proposal for the I-81 corridor, endangers scenic viewsheds, Civil War battlefields, productive farmland, community identity and a growing heritage tourism industry.

THE BACKGROUND:

In 1999, VDOT's Route 340 corridor study proposed an increase to four and five lanes from Front Royal to Luray, even though according to VDOT's own figures, the current roadway is as safe as or safer than most other roads in its classification (accidents on the road currently fall below State averages). VDOT justified the scheme with an unsubstantiated projected traffic count for 2020. To make way for the additional lanes, engineers proposed "taking" all 57 roadside buildings in Bentonville, literally wiping the village off the map.

Scenic 340 Project, a grass roots, non-profit citizens group, was formed to oppose the study's scheme and to explore alternative solutions for the future. Our research shows that if built as shown in VDOT's study, the project will increase speeds, cause significant environmental harm, and have a negative impact on agriculture, heritage tourism, and recreational industries of the Page Valley.

Largely due to a shortage of funds, VDOT has presently abandoned the expansion of Route 340 from two lanes to four lanes; however the expansion still remains on VDOT's long range plan, VTRANS 2025. Today, "improvements" have been limited to replacing four bridges in need of repair. The first bridge scheduled for replacement is the Overall Bridge on the Page/Warren County line. Under pressure from Scenic 340 Project, and with input from the Department of Historic Resources, VDOT modified the design of this bridge to be more respectful to the newly listed Milford Civil War Battlefield at Overall and to the riverscape of the Shenandoah River.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

In designing the Overall Bridge, VDOT has used some aesthetic finishes (faux-stone facings, rustic guard rails, landscaping rehabilitation) that will make the bridge "kinder and gentler" to the eye. This falls into step with the Federal Highway Administration's recommendation that Departments of Transportation use Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS). However, in the case of the Overall Bridge, VDOT's use of CSS is only skin deep – a cosmetic concession tacked on at the end of the process. Context Sensitive Solutions should begin well before the design phase.

THE SCENIC 340 PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

WHAT: A grassroots movement to ensure that context sensitive solutions are embraced by VDOT

WHY: Use of context sensitive solution principals to maintain a safe road corridor will ensure that our cultural and environmental resources are protected for the future

Positive outcomes

Develop production communication pathways between VDOT and local stakeholders

Increase public awareness of complex transportation issues

Develop a multi-disciplinary teams with a collaborative approach for Virginia's transportation projects

Continue to exceed State safety standards with passive traffic calming strategies

Protect our historic battlefields, our farmland and the scenic and recreational values of our forests and rivers

Make mobility compatible with our unique Shenandoah Valley heritage

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CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS - DEFINED

CSS is a collaborative, team approach. In CSS, all stakeholders are identified at the inception of a project, and may include local residents, citizens groups, economic groups (farmers, small and large businesses), historic preservation professionals, county planners, landscape architects, and environmental engineers. Representatives of each stakeholder group are then brought together to work as a team with transportation engineers. Stakeholders have an equal voice and their expertise is used from the beginning of the planning process. For example, civil engineers have primary say on road safety issues, while a historian could modify the design to protect important cultural resources and an environmental engineer would have the power to protect ecologically fragile areas. Through a process of give and take, the resulting solution balances transportation safety and mobility with the preservation of scenic aesthetic, historic and environmental resources. As a result of this proactive involvement, transportation projects will move ahead more smoothly with fewer delays, critical resources will be preserved and communities will have a sense of ownership and pride in the projects.

OUR GOALS:

Scenic 340 Project is asking the Commonwealth to:

- Produce a new corridor study that employs context sensitive solutions for all future improvements to Route 340 in the Page Valley.
- Adopt a policy of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Most states including Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and The District of Columbia have developed and implemented the principals of CSS. West Virginia does not have a formal program; however, they do practice and believe that good design always recognizes the environment, historic resources, and community needs.

IN CONCLUSION:

In the VTRANS 2025 plan there is reference to *consider community impacts in the planning, design, and construction of transportation facilities and services*, however there needs to be definitive language supporting and implementing CSS. Local and state government, community organizations and local residents are increasingly supporting initiatives for VDOT to engage the public in a planning process that would restore public trust in VDOT, protect landowners, communities and historic landmarks, and preserve the valuable resources at risk.

We urge you to support Scenic 340 Project's proposal that the Commonwealth adopt Context Sensitive Solutions as a permanent policy. Help us require the Commonwealth to re-examine the direct, secondary and cumulative impacts or transportation projects. Help us require VDOT to consult with experts in the use of Context Sensitive Solutions that will sustain community resources, protect the Skyline Drive and Shenandoah River viewsheds, and utilize public funds effectively — without compromising safety.

By requiring VDOT to use Context Sensitive Solutions, we can provide for the future mobility in our region, protect our valuable historic and environmental heritage, and adhere to Warren and Page County Comprehensive Plans for maintaining rural character.